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Whitney Knollenberg

North Carolina State University

Ashley Schroeder

Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Management, The Pennsylvania State University

Hailey Post

North Carolina State University

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Initial Steps Towards Understanding Advocacy Planning Efforts in the Tourism Industry

Introduction

In recent times, policy changes at the local, state, and federal levels have increasingly impacted the tourism industry. Tourism can be impacted by a variety of policy decisions including, but not limited to, changes in DMO funding models and implementation of social or environmental policies that may negatively impact destination image and visitation. For example, Mexico recently eliminated its National Tourism Office (Lenhart, 2019) and the State Tourism Offices of Texas and Missouri have faced budget cuts of up to 50% from state appropriations (Bailey, 2018; Watson, 2018). Other policy changes, particularly those related to social and environmental issues, also have the potential to impact tourism. For example, the introduction and passage of House Bill 2 in North Carolina, a policy that would require people to use public restrooms that match the sex on their birth certificate, led to travel bans, cancelled events, and a negative perception of the state among some potential visitors (Dalesio & Drew, 2017). As a result, advocacy in its many forms has become a vital activity for members of the tourism industry and the associations that represent their interests. While this is an area of increasing focus for the industry, there has been limited research designed to understand how tourism organizations plan for and engage in advocacy. This presentation will provide initial findings from a study that aims to address this limited understanding.

Literature Review

Advocacy includes efforts to educate decision-makers (e.g., policymakers, voters) on the impacts of a decision (Baumgartner, Berry, Hojnacki, Leech, & Kimball, 2009). In order to communicate the impact of decisions, members of the tourism industry rely upon the advocacy efforts of associations that represent their collective interests. Associations that represent the tourism industry and its various operating sectors are often tasked with leading advocacy efforts because they are able to amass the financial and human resources needed to educate policymakers. In this way, they take on the role of providing a voice for the tourism industry. This is a challenge for any association representing a wide variety of stakeholders, but can be particularly difficult in the tourism industry because stakeholders often have divergent views on the impacts of policy changes (Knollenberg, 2015).

Research, however, has shown that the most impactful advocacy effort for tourism is speaking to policymakers with a single unified voice (McGehee & Meng, 2006). Tourism associations charged with advocacy are, therefore, required to be effective leaders in establishing that unified voice for the industry (Knollenberg, 2015). This role is further complicated by the fact that some associations are charged with leading advocacy efforts (e.g., National Restaurant Association), while others (e.g., quasi-governmental DMOs) are limited in their advocacy efforts because they are partially funded through public sources. This creates a complicated landscape for tourism associations tasked with engaging in advocacy. Unifying the tourism industry around a position on policy changes and then delivering that voice through advocacy strategies is challenging. However, to effectively advocate on the industry's behalf, it is necessary.

While there have been efforts to examine the role of individual leaders in tourism advocacy (Knollenberg, 2015) and advocacy strategies used in tourism (Bramwell & Meyer, 2007; McGehee & Meng, 2006; Swanson & Brothers, 2012), there have been very limited efforts to understand the

role of tourism associations in planning for advocacy on behalf of the tourism industry. Accordingly, this research seeks to identify how tourism associations engage in advocacy planning, who is involved in these planning efforts, what resources associations utilize when planning for advocacy efforts, and what resources are needed to improve their planning efforts.

Co-management theory will inform the research questions that this study seeks to answer. Developed to understand how multiple actors utilize and contribute to common resources, co-management theory has been applied to a variety of contexts (Marin, Gelcich, Castilla, & Berkes, 2012), including public service delivery (Brandsen & van Hout, 2006), natural resources management (Brewer & Moon, 2015), and the tourism industry's response to crises (Pennington-Gray, Schroeder, & Gale, 2014). Co-management requires the sharing of human, economic, or social resources among actors across multiple hierarchical levels (e.g., association staff, executive board members, or association members) (Carlsson & Berkes, 2005). The utilization of co-management typically occurs when significant change in an environment occurs or is eminent, necessitating a sharing of resources (Mitchell, 1997). It has been found that the use of co-management in these situations results in outcomes such as improved decision making, increased capacity to respond to change, and the legitimization of actions by actors across levels (Plummer & Fitzgibbon, 2004). Five key characteristics of co-management have been found to facilitate these outcomes. They are (1) pluralism, (2) communication/ negotiation, (3) transactive decision-making, (4) social learning, and (5) shared action/ commitment. Pluralism requires the inclusion of a range of interests and actors in co-management activities (Meadowcroft, 1998). Communication and negotiation among these diverse actors allows for the exchange of information and leads to shared understanding (Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). This communication among diverse actors representing multiple knowledge systems results in transactive decision-making, which yields decisions that benefit from addressing a variety of perspectives and needs (Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). Not only does communication and negotiation lead to transactive decisions, but it also facilitates social learning in which actors mutually gain knowledge, discover shared values, and develop response strategies based on feedback from others engaged in co-management (Selin & Chavez, 1995). The shared action or commitment that ultimately results from this social learning is a shared response that multiple actors engage in to address change and prepare for future co-management opportunities (Berkes, 1997). This study will identify how associations utilize the constructs of co-management theory to engage in planning for advocacy efforts.

Research Aims

To address the need for an increased understanding of advocacy planning efforts, this research is guided by six research questions that will be examined in the context of individual tourism organizations and their advocacy efforts associated with state-level policy changes (Table 1).

Table 1. Research Questions

Research Question	Relevance to Tourism Research
How do tourism associations define successful advocacy efforts?	An understanding of perceived success in advocacy efforts will advance the ability to measure the impact of various factors on that perceived success.
What advocacy planning efforts are being or have been	Identification of advocacy planning efforts will allow for exploration of their effectiveness in a variety of policy change contexts.

undertaken by tourism associations?	
What resources do tourism associations currently integrate into plans to support advocacy planning efforts?	Knowledge of resources used for advocacy planning allows for measurement of the use and impact of such resources.
What are tourism associations' primary obstacles to planning for advocacy efforts?	Conceptualization of obstacles in advocacy planning efforts improves the identification of the causes of these obstacles and their impact on advocacy effort success.
What resources do tourism associations need to support advocacy planning efforts?	Understanding advocacy planning resources that are currently lacking helps researchers explain shortcomings in perceived success of advocacy efforts.
How do organizational variables affect respondents' perceived level of advocacy success?	Knowledge of the impacts of these variables can lead to the development of a theoretical understanding of what factors influence the success of advocacy efforts.

Methodology

This proposed research study will utilize an exploratory sequential mixed method design to answer the research questions. Phase 1 will be used to collect qualitative data through phone interviews. Phase 2 will be used to collect quantitative data through an online survey (Phase 2). This design is valuable and appropriate, because with limited efforts to-date to measure advocacy planning efforts in the context of associations, the responses from the qualitative interviews in Phase 1 will help inform the quantitative survey questions implemented in Phase 2 (Creswell & Clark, 2017). This presentation will focus on the qualitative phase of the study.

In the qualitative phase of data collection, fifty tourism industry association leaders will be invited to participate in in-depth semi-structured phone interviews designed to gather data that will address research questions 1-5. In order to identify tourism industry association leaders, an hourly student research assistant will be tasked with collecting the contact information (e.g., phone and email) for advocacy leaders within state level associations who engage in advocacy on behalf of the tourism industry. These associations may represent a specific sector of the industry (e.g., the North Carolina Restaurant and Lodging Association), all sectors of the industry (e.g., North Carolina Travel Industry Association), or may be a state DMO (e.g., VisitNC). These organizations have a staff leader (e.g., an Executive Director or President), as well as an elected Board of Directors. Depending on the size of the organization, they may have staff or a board subcommittee dedicated to advocacy efforts on behalf of the industry. Contact information will be collected for the staff members who engage in advocacy efforts through the association. Participants who consent to an interview will also be asked to assist in snowball sampling efforts by providing names and contact information of others affiliated with the association who participate in advocacy planning efforts (e.g., executive board members or other staff).

Contact information from as many tourism advocacy associations as possible will be collected, with each state having at least one association included. The collection of contact information for association leaders will be supported through the research team's affiliations with regional and international organizations such as the Southeast Tourism Society (STS) and the Travel and

Tourism Research Association (TTRA). These organizations maintain membership lists that can be used to access contact information for association leaders and are willing to provide an introduction of the study to population members if needed. The population for this phase of data collection will be at least fifty tourism industry association leaders. To gather a convenience and snowball sample, each of the identified association leaders will be sent an email invitation to participate in a phone interview. The email will also introduce the research team, the purpose of the study, the intended outcomes of the study, and its benefits to the tourism industry. A reminder email will be sent within a week if a response is not received.

If a tourism industry association leader consents to participate, they will be interviewed over the phone at a time that is most convenient for them. With the participant's consent, the interview will be audio recorded. The audio recording will be sent to an online transcription service for transcription. Data collection following this procedure will continue until data saturation is achieved. Upon completion of the interviews, the transcriptions will be analyzed using open and axial coding, allowing themes related to the constructs of co-management theory to emerge along with others relevant to the research questions.

Expected Outcomes

Using the research questions (Table 1) and the constructs of co-management theory to guide data analysis will provide the opportunity to increase understanding of how tourism associations engage in efforts to plan for advocacy. Specifically, the findings will shed light on how tourism associations define advocacy, which is a critical piece of knowledge to ensure that there are unified efforts to educate others on the impacts of policy decisions. Findings will also reveal what resources are currently used and which ones are needed to facilitate efforts to plan for advocacy in the tourism industry. It is also anticipated that findings will provide insights on the obstacles that limit tourism associations from engaging in advocacy. Collectively, it is intended that this information will shed light on best practices that tourism associations can use to engage in efforts to plan for advocacy. Improvements in such efforts may result in greater advocacy success for tourism associations.

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